

Listing of Claims:

This listing of claims replaces all prior versions and listings of claims in the application.

1. (Withdrawn)

2. (Currently amended) A method of producing a hydrogen absorbing alloy for an alkaline storage battery, characterized in that

a first step of obtaining particles of a hydrogen absorbing alloy having a crystal structure of a CaCu_5 type and represented by a composition formula $\text{MmNi}_x\text{Co}_y\text{Mn}_z\text{M}_{1-z}$ (in the formula, M is at least one element selected from aluminum and copper, x is a composition ratio of nickel and satisfies $3.0 \leq x \leq 5.2$, y is a composition ratio of cobalt and satisfies $0 \leq y \leq 1.2$, and z is a composition ratio of manganese and satisfies $0.1 \leq z \leq 0.9$, with the proviso that the sum of x, y, and z satisfies $4.4 \leq x + y + z \leq 5.4$),

a second step of treating said particles of the hydrogen absorbing alloy in an acid solution to which at least one of nickel compound and cobalt compound is added, and

a third step of heat-treating by sintering ~~the~~ only the particles of the hydrogen absorbing alloy treated in the acid solution at a temperature of not more than the melting point of the particles of the hydrogen absorbing alloy in a hydrogen atmosphere and thereby moving Mn contained in the particle of the hydrogen absorbing alloy to the surface of the particle of the hydrogen absorbing alloy

are carried out, to produce the hydrogen absorbing alloy, the hydrogen absorbing alloy having a sintered surface region and a bulk region covered with the surface region and satisfying the condition of $a/b \geq 1.21$, wherein a is the sum of respective abundance ratios of atoms Ni, Co, and Mn in the surface region and wherein b is the sum of respective abundance ratios of atoms Ni, Co, and Mn and the surface region having an atom manganese.

3. (Canceled)

4. (Previously presented) The method according to claim 2, characterized in that in adding at least one of a nickel compound and a cobalt compound to the acid solution, the amount of the compound to be added is in the range of 0.3 to 5.0 % by weight of the particles of the hydrogen absorbing alloy.

5. (Original) The method according to claim 2, characterized in that the pH of the acid solution in said second step is in the range of 0.7 to 2.0.

6-10. (Withdrawn)